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HISTORICAL SKETCH

OF

NORTHBOROUGH,

MASSACHUSETTS.

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HISTORICAL SKETCH OF NORTHBOROUGH.

BY REV. JOSEPH ALLEN, D. D.

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NORTHBOROUGH is the youngest of the four *Borough* towns, not having been incorporated till 1766; although it became a precinct, known as the Second Precinct in Westborough, twenty-two years before; viz., October 20, 1744, O. S., answering to October 31, N. S. It did not acquire the rank or enjoy the full immunities of a town till the commencement of the Revolutionary war, when, by a general act of the Provincial Congress, all incorporated districts were declared to be entitled to all the privileges and immunities of towns.

From 1717, when Westborough, then including the principal part of Northborough, was incorporated, till 1744, the inhabitants of the whole district formed one corporate body, who met together at the same place, for the transaction of public business and for public worship, and made appropriations from the common treasury for the support of the minister, for the purposes of education, for the repair of the highways, &c., and, with the exception of public worship, this united action continued till 1766.

Northborough contains, within its present limits, 10,150 acres—a little less than sixteen square miles. It is of irregular shape; its greatest length being from the north-east to the south-west. It lies principally in a valley, between the high lands of Marlborough on the east, of Berlin on the north, and of Shrewsbury and Boylston on the west. This interval spreads out to the south, and extends to the hills of Hopkinton and Upton, including a large part of Westborough.

The river Assabet, which has its sources in the hills of Grafton and Shrewsbury, runs through the town, forming part of the boundary line on the south-east, between Westborough and Northborough. It receives several tributaries in its course, and furnishes water-power for two cotton-mills and several saw and grist-mills and comb shops. Its general course is north and north-east, leading to Feltonville and Assabet, and thence to Concord, forming the north branch of Concord river, which falls into the Merrimac at Lowell. Its Indian name

has been retained, which has also been given to a beautiful hill near the village, formerly called Liquor Hill. The principal streams that fall into the Assabet in its course through the town are: 1. Hop Brook, which, rising in Shrewsbury, crosses the south-west angle of the town, furnishing water-power for a saw-mill and grist-mill, and falls into the Assabet soon after that river enters the town. A small stream, called Bummit Brook, which carries the saw-mill of Jonathan Bartlett, falls into Hop Brook. 2. Stirrup Brook, the outlet of Great and Little Chauney Ponds; the former in Westborough, in the vicinity of the State Reform School; the latter lying wholly in Northborough. This stream furnishes water-power for Bartlett's saw, shingle, and grist-mills, and falls into the Assabet in the north-easterly part of the town.* 3. Cold Harbor Brook, which, rising in Shrewsbury, and receiving a tributary stream from Rocky Pond in Boylston, furnishes water-power for two grist-mills and a saw-mill; then running through Cold Harbor meadow, and crossing the road between the village and the Old Congregational Church, forming other mill-sites, falls into the river Assabet, a hundred rods below the bridge. 4. Howard Brook, which, having its sources in the north-westerly part of the town, crosses the Clinton road a little to the north of the New Cemetery, furnishing water-power for a saw-mill and two or three comb-shops before it falls into the Assabet.

The surface, though more even than that of most of the towns in Worcester County, is diversified by hills and valleys, by rocks and plains, by swamps and meadows. The soil is generally fertile, most of the cleared land producing fine crops of hay and grain, with excellent pasturage, especially on the hills. In the northern part of the town the land is very uneven, being composed of ledges of rock, principally *gneiss*, lying in strata, having in some places a dip of 70° or 80° . This is the principal rock of this part of the State, though the strata differ widely in different localities, being less regular and less easily worked in this region than in the towns farther south. There is a vein of *hornblende* running through the town from north-east to south-west, crossing the road that leads to Westborough, and forming a hard ledge about a mile south of the Railroad station, and extending through Cedar Swamp to Tomlin Hill, so called.

In the westerly part of the town, the rocks are of a slaty structure, and seem to contain a good deal of iron ore, as the rock easily decomposes when exposed to the air, having the appearance of iron-rust.

* George C. Davis, Esq., informs me that from old records which he has seen, it appears that the stream that forms the outlet of Chauney Pond, was called "Honey Brook," probably from the swarms of wild bees found in that vicinity. Stirrup Brook, so called from a hill of that name in Marlborough, falls into Honey Brook below Bartlett Mills, and gives its name to the main stream.

Clay of a superior quality is found in several localities, from which large quantities of brick have been made, many of which were used in building the Cochituate aqueduct. Limestone is also found in a few places, but it has never been worked to any considerable extent.

The principal hills are Mount Assabet, overlooking the village, clothed on the eastern declivity by a fine grove of oaks—the other sides, with the summit, being cleared and cultivated; Ball Hill, at the north-west extremity, containing about 1,000 acres of excellent land for grazing or tillage; Edmund Hill north of the village, Cedar Hill to the south-east, and Tomlin Hill to the south-west. Besides these, there are other beautiful elevations giving a pleasing variety to the landscape, some of which are cleared and converted into pastures, and others remain covered with a fine growth of forest trees.

Besides artificial ponds formed by dams, there are only two natural collections of water worthy of mention. The larger of these is Little Chauncy Pond, near the State Reform School, and Solomon's Pond, in the north-easterly part of the town, so called in commemoration of an Indian of that name who was drowned therein.

The Village, so called by way of distinction, consists principally of buildings standing on half a mile of the main street, (which runs east and west, being a part of the old stage route from Boston to Worcester,) with such other buildings as are in close proximity to the Main street. Besides a goodly number of dwelling-houses, the village contains three handsome church edifices, two hotels, four English goods stores, a large shoe manufactory, a two-story brick school-house, the bank, the post-office, the rail-road depot, the engine-house, and the town-house.

The other principal roads are the one leading to Westborough, one to Feltonville, one to Boylston, and two, one east and the other west of the old Congregational church, leading to Berlin, Clinton and Lancaster.

Farming, in its various branches, furnishes employment to a large portion of the inhabitants, though many young men are engaged in the manufacture of combs and in the shoe business. The two cotton-mills on the Assabet have furnished employment to about fifty hands, and run two thousand spindles. One of these was destroyed by fire, December 3, 1860, but will probably be rebuilt. This was the old cotton factory, erected by a company in the time of the last war with Great Britain, 1814, at a cost of \$30,000. The other, which is of brick, was built in 1832-3, by the brothers Phineas, Joseph, and Isaac Davis, Esqs., at a cost of \$30,300, (including four houses and land.) It remained in the possession of members of that family till the death of the last survivor, Isaac Davis, Esq., in 1859. Both factories are now in the possession of the Messrs. Pratt, of Grafton.

The manufacture of combs was introduced into this place by Haynes & Bush, about the year 1839, and is still carried on, to a considerable extent, by the Brothers Wilder & Warren, T. Bush, Milo Hildreth & Brothers, and several other firms or individuals.

The tanning business, also, is prosecuted to some extent in this town. It was commenced in the midst of the Revolutionary war, about 1778, by Deacon Isaac Davis, father of Gov. John Davis, continued by his sons, Isaac and Joseph Davis, Esqrs., and is now owned and carried on by his grandson, George C. Davis, Esq.

The Agricultural Railroad, which at present terminates in this village, furnishes an easy communication with the market; and, when completed, will form a desirable connection with the northern and north-western routes.

Settlement, Population, &c.

Some time previous to the close of the seventeenth century, some parts of the territory now included within the limits of Northborough had been laid out for farms. The first settler, according to tradition, was John Brigham, from Sudbury, to whom a grant of land was made in 1672, on "Liquor Meadow Plain," as stated in the deed, and which we may suppose covered a tract of nearly level ground, extending north from the foot of Liquor Hill, or Mount Assabet, so as to include the site of the saw-mill, which he soon afterwards erected, and of the log-cabin which he built, near where the saw-mill of Wilder Bush now stands. Other grants of land were made in the same year; one to Samuel Goodnow, and another to John Rediat, "on the Nepmuck road that formerly led toward Coneticoat," both of which were probably within the bounds of this town.

At the time of the division of Westborough into two precincts, or parishes, that is, in 1744, the north precinct contained thirty-eight families. After the separation, measures were at once adopted by the inhabitants of the north precinct to build a meeting-house and to settle a minister. After much controversy respecting a location, the question was submitted to referees, who fixed on a spot a little to the west of that now occupied by the old meeting-house belonging to the First parish. The land on which it stands was given to the town by Capt. James Eager, April 26, 1745, for the use of the inhabitants, "so long," the deed runs, "as the said inhabitants of the north precinct shall improve said land for the standing of a meeting-house for the public worship of God."

Before the separation, the inhabitants of the whole district, comprising both towns, at first called "Chauncy," or "Chauncy Village," worshiped together in the old meeting-house, which stood near Weston's tavern, now the Water-Cure establishment.

Northborough became an incorporated District, January 24, 1766 ; till which time its inhabitants continued to exercise their rights as citizens of Westborough, receiving their share of the appropriations made for the support of schools, for repairing the highways, &c.

From the date of its incorporation to the commencement of the Revolutionary war, in 1775, when, as above-mentioned, it assumed the rank of a town, Northborough exercised all the rights and enjoyed all the privileges secured to other towns, excepting the privilege of sending a delegate or representative to the "Great and General Court," in this case voting with Westborough. It raised money for the maintenance of public worship, for the support of schools, for repairs on the highways, &c., and was not backward in furnishing men to join the several expeditions, undertaken by the Government of England, for the conquest of Canada.

Three men joined the expedition to Halifax in 1754 ; two were at Crown Point in 1755 ; and in 1758, eight young men from this small district were with the army under Gen. Abercrombie, at his defeat before Ticonderoga, one of whom, Capt. Timothy Brigham, who lived till October 5, 1828, to the advanced age of ninety-three, was second in command under Capt. Samuel Wood of this town, (who died September 21, 1818, at the age of seventy-five,) of the company of Minute Men, which marched down to Cambridge on the memorable 19th of April, 1775, and which took part in the battle of Bunker Hill, on the 17th of June following, when Capt. Wood received a slight wound on the retreat of the American troops. The wound, though in the back, was not regarded as a dishonorable one ; nor was it of so serious a nature as to prevent the brave captain from attending public worship the following Sunday, in his native village, with the rent in his coat unrepaired.

The inhabitants of this precinct took an early and decided stand in defense of their rights in the controversy with the mother country, which preceded the breaking out of hostilities in 1775. As early as March, 1773, at a meeting of the citizens called for the purpose of consulting together on public affairs, it was "*Voted*, as the opinion of this district, that it is the indispensable duty of all men, and all bodies of men, to unite and strenuously oppose, by all lawful ways and means, such unjust and unrighteous encroachments, made or attempted to be made, upon their just rights ; and that it is our duty earnestly to endeavor to hand these rights down inviolate to our posterity, as they were handed to us by our worthy ancestors."

The following communication appears in the Massachusetts Gazette for February 17, 1773 : " We hear from Shrewsbury, that, one day last week, a peddler was observed to go into a tavern there, with a bag containing about 30 pounds of Tea. Information of which being had

at Northborough, about 5 miles distance, a Number of Indians went from the Great Swamp, or thereabouts, seized upon it, and committed it to the flames, in the road facing said Tavern, where it was entirely consum'd." This was the same year that the tea was thrown over-board in Boston harbor, by a band of young men disguised as Indians.

In 1774, the District passed the following patriotic vote : " That we are determined to defend our Charter rights and privileges, at the risk of our lives and fortunes, and that the town desire the Committee of Correspondence to write to their brethren in Boston and inform them thereof." Again, June 3, 1776, a month before the Declaration of Independence was signed at Philadelphia, it was resolved : " That it is the mind of this town to be independent of Great Britain, in case the Continental Congress think proper : and that we are ready, with our lives and fortunes, if in Providence called, to defend the same."

Nor did these spirited resolutions end in idle words. At one time, five, soon after, three, at another time, five, at another, seven, and on one occasion, *seventeen* men were called for from this small town, and were marched hundreds of miles, to mingle in the scenes of war.

Nor was this all. Taking into consideration the hardships undergone by those who had entered into the service of their country, and especially the losses they had sustained by being paid in a depreciated currency, the town voted, December 28, 1780, in the midst of that winter of unprecedented severity, to raise their quota of men, (eight in all, to serve three years,) and *to pay and clothe them at their own expense*, allowing them forty shillings each a month, in hard money, in addition to their clothes.

The number was very small of those who refused to embark in the cause of freedom ; the names of four only being recorded as absentees, whose estates were confiscated near the close of the war. And although the people were reduced to the greatest straits, owing to the depreciation of the currency, the want of a circulating medium, and the embarrassments of debt, yet almost all proved loyal in the trying times that followed. Only four of the citizens of this town were implicated in the Shays Rebellion, as it was called, which had its headquarters in the western part of Worcester County, and which had its origin in these very grievances.

More prosperous times followed the adoption of the Federal Constitution, and Northborough shared with other towns in the general prosperity.

Churches, Ministers, &c.

Soon after Northborough had become a separate precinct, viz., in the winter of 1745, measures were taken for building a meeting-house,

with a view to the permanent establishment of public worship. The first meeting-house was built the same year; and on the 21st of May, 1776, O. S., answering to June 1st, Rev. John Martyn was ordained as the minister. Mr. Martyn was an able and faithful pastor; and during his ministry of nearly twenty-one years, was highly esteemed by his people, and by his brethren in the ministry. He died, after a short sickness, April 30, 1767, in the sixty-first year of his age. He was a native of Boston, and a graduate of Harvard College of the year 1724.

Rabbi Jndah Monis, a converted Jew, for forty years Hebrew Instructor in Harvard College, and who had married a sister of Mrs. Martyn, of the name of Merrit, after the death of his wife in 1761, came to live with his brother-in-law, Mr. Martyn, where he remained till his death, April 25, 1764, at the age of eighty-one.

By his will, among other bequests, he left a legacy of one hundred and twenty-six pounds, as a fund, the interest of which was to be devoted to the relief of indigent widows of deceased clergymen, appointing trustees for apportioning it; who, with their successors, have fulfilled the trust. The fund now amounts to four hundred dollars. He also gave a silver cup and a large silver tankard, since converted into two cups, inscribed with his name, for the communion table.

The grave of Rabbi Judah Monis is near that of his brother-in-law, Rev. Mr. Martyn, in the old burying-ground, and both are marked by monuments, with appropriate inscriptions.

On the fourth of the following November, (1767,) six months only after the death of Mr. Martyn, Rev. Peter Whitney, son of Rev. Aaron Whitney, of Petersham, was ordained as his successor. Mr. Whitney was graduated at Harvard College in 1762, and was married to Julia Lambert, of Reading, by whom he had ten children, who lived to the age of maturity. Mr. Whitney's ministry was long, peaceful and prosperous, and terminated in his sudden death, February 29, 1816, in the seventy-second year of his life and the forty-ninth of his ministry.

The present senior pastor of the church, Rev. Joseph Allen, was ordained October 30th, 1816, at whose request, after a ministry of forty years, a colleague was given him, he still retaining his office. Rev. Trowbridge B. Forbush, a graduate of Meadville Theological School, the jnnior pastor, was ordained January 1, 1857.

The meeting-house of the First Congregational Society was erected in 1808, and remodeled in 1848.

Two other ecclesiastical societies have been formed in this town within the last thirty-five years, viz., the Baptist Society, organized February 3, 1827; and the Evangelical Congregational Society, April 3, 1832. Both are flourishing societies, and are furnished with hand-

some church edifices, erected, the former in 1860, and dedicated November 28; that belonging to the Evangelical Congregational Society in 1847, and dedicated February 23, 1848.

The first pastor of the Baptist church was Rev. Alonzo King. His successors were Edward Seagrave, William H. Dalrymple, Bartlett Pease, Artemas M. Piper, Tubal Wakefield, and Charles Farrar. The present incumbent, Rev. Silas Ripley, entered on his pastorate in May, 1855.

The pastors of the Evangelical Congregational Church were:—1. Samuel Austin Fay, ordained October 17, 1832; dismissed October 19, 1836. 2. Daniel H. Emerson, ordained October 19, 1836; dismissed April 23, 1840. 3. William A. Houghton, ordained July 5, 1843; dismissed June 11, 1851. 4. Samuel S. Ashley, installed June 16, 1852.

From March 1841 to December 1842, the pulpit was stately supplied by Rev. Dr. Bates, formerly President of Middlebury College, Vermont.

Schools, Lyceums, Libraries, &c.

Four years after the act of incorporation, that is, in 1770, the town was divided into four squadrons, as they were called; and ten years afterwards, or in 1780, a grant was made of £4,000, in a very depreciated currency, amounting to only \$175, which was increased by subsequent grant to about \$545, for building four school-houses; about \$136 for each.

The number of school-districts at present is six, in which schools are kept, on an average, six months in the year; the Centre School having two departments, each furnished with a separate teacher. For the support of these schools the town makes an annual appropriation of from \$1,200 to \$1,300. The wages of male teachers are from \$40 to \$50 a month, including board, while the wages of female teachers are from \$20 to \$25.

All the school-houses but one are of brick; the one in the centre is of two stories, and furnished with a bell; and all are of modern construction, and in tolerably good repair. The cost of the five brick school-houses was about \$7,000.

The first school committee was chosen April, 1826, agreeably to an enactment of the Legislature, passed March 4th, the same year; before which time the minister and the selectmen were the visitors and superintendents of the schools. The preceding year, 1825, this town chose a Committee of seven members, "on uniformity of school books," which committee, in May of the same year, made their report, recommending a list of class books to be used in all the schools in town,

to the exclusion of all others, which report was accepted, and a great and growing evil was thereby corrected. From this period, (1826,) more than ten years before the Board of Education was established, the school committee made a report to the town, each year, of their doings, and of the state of the schools, copies of which are contained in the town records.

In 1830, the town voted to introduce Holbrook's School Apparatus, which accordingly was done ; the articles were manufactured by Capt. Thomas W. Lyon, an ingenious machinist of this town. Two years earlier, 1828, the town adopted a system of regulations, which was published for the use of the teachers, and which, with some modifications, is still in force.

Few towns in this Commonwealth, it is believed, in proportion to their size, have furnished a larger number of teachers during the last half century than this. A friend has furnished us with a list, containing the names of fifty-seven teachers, male and female, whose education was obtained principally in our public schools, who found employment as teachers in this and other places, during the first thirty years of the present century. During the last thirty years, the number must have been much larger, as more than thirty have graduated at our Normal Schools, most of them at the one in Bridgewater. Many of them have found employment in various parts of the country. Some of the teachers who have gone from this town, have continued in the employment for thirty or forty years, and some are still in active service. Several attempts have been made to establish a permanent High School in this place, but hitherto without success. That institution, so much needed, and so earnestly desired by many, is yet *in the future*, but cannot, we think, long be delayed.

Although this is a reading community, there is no large public library in town, the people depending on parish, or private libraries, or book clubs. A juvenile library, afterwards converted into a Sunday school library, was formed in 1824, replenished by an annual contribution, and which for many years furnished reading for all the children in town, who chose to apply for them. Sunday school libraries are now connected with the several parishes, or religious societies.

Libraries for young women and for young men have been instituted, and have flourished for many years ; but, as the proprietors became scattered, the libraries went to decay, and have ceased to exist. A free public library, supported by the town, in accordance with a statute of the Commonwealth, passed May, 1851, would be a great public benefit, and is "a consummation devoutly to be wished." The benefits of such an institution will be realized in "the good time coming." A "Social Library" was instituted as early as 1792, and was main-

tained till its incorporation with the Free Library of the First Parish, in 1828.

A Lyceum was established in 1828, which, after continuing in active operation for about thirty years, gave place to the "Young Men's Lyceum," which flourished for a few years, and was then suffered to die out. A Course of Lectures has been given in the Town Hall each season since the winter of 1826-7, till 1860-1, a period of thirty-four years. For many years the lecture was followed by a discussion, or debate, on some subject previously assigned.

The population of the town, fifty years ago, was less than 800. It has more than doubled since, though the increase during the last ten years has been quite inconsiderable. In 1850, it was 1,535; in 1860, 1,563. The increase in wealth, during the same period of ten years, has been much greater in proportion to the number of inhabitants. In 1850, the valuation was \$625,596: in 1860, it amounted to \$947,539, being an increase of nearly \$322,000.

The Agricultural Branch Railroad, which has its present terminus in Northborough, was finished in 1855. The Northborough Bank was incorporated in 1854, with a capital of \$100,000: of this institution, George C. Davis, Esq., is President, and Abraham W. Seaver, Cashier.

In 1831, the town, by a unanimous vote passed March 7th, accepted a munificent donation of \$3,000 from Henry Gassett, Esq., a merchant of Boston, but a native of this town. This is an accumulating fund, one-sixth of the interest of which, after reaching the sum of \$4,000, is to be annually added to the principal, and the other five-sixths to be applied to the support of the minister, for the time being, of the First Congregational Society, so long as such Society should exist, and "maintain a good and convenient house for public worship on or near the spot where the present meeting-house stands." Mr. Gassett died in Boston, August 15, 1855, at the age of eighty-three.

The Town Hall was built in 1822, and a basement story added for a Vestry in 1833. The town clock was a present from the late Jonas Ball, a short time before his death, in 1847.



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